

9-06-25 Message to Roeh Israel Abilene – *Ki Tetse* (when you go out)
Torah Portion: Deuteronomy 21:10 – 25:19
Haftarah: Isaiah 54:1-10
Suggested Acheron K'tuvim: Rev 19:6-9

Biblical Dispute Resolution 16 – Productive Conversations 6 – Listening

Central question: How can I listen best, in a productive conversation?

We are this week in parasha *Ki Tetse*. Its name comes from the first four words in English, and the first two words in the original Hebrew.

Deut 21:10-13

10 "When you go out to battle against your enemies, and the Lord your God delivers them into your hands, and you take them away captive, 11 and see among the captives a beautiful woman, and have a desire for her and would take her as a wife for yourself, 12 then you shall bring her home to your house, and she shall shave her head and trim her nails.

יְהוָה	וַיַּחַדְנוּ	אֹיְבֶיךָ	עַל־	לְמִלְחָמָה	תֵּצֵא	כִּי־	10
the Lord	and hath	thine enemies,	against	to war	thou goest forth	When	
<u>3068</u>	<u>5414</u>	<u>341</u>	<u>5921</u>	<u>4421</u>	<u>3318</u>	<u>3588</u>	
	שְׁבוֹי:	וְשָׁבִית	בְּיָדְךָ	אֱלֹהֶיךָ			
	captive,	and thou hast taken them	into thine hands,	thy God			
	<u>7617</u>	<u>7617</u>	<u>3027</u>	<u>430</u>			
	כִּי	וְחָשַׁקְתָּ	יִפְתָּ־תָאֵר	אִשָּׁה	בְּשָׁבִיָּה	וְרֵאִיתָ	11
unto her,	and hast a desire	beautiful	a woman,	among the captives	And seest		
<u>871a</u>	<u>2836</u>	<u>8389</u> <u>3303</u>	<u>802</u>	<u>7633</u>	<u>7200</u>		
		לְאִשָּׁה:	לָךְ	וְלָקַחְתָּ			
		to thy wife;	her	thou that wouldst have			
		<u>802</u>	<u>9999</u>	<u>3807a</u>	<u>3947</u>		
רֹאשָׁהּ	אֶת־	וַיַּגְלַחְהּ	בֵּיתְךָ	תּוֹךְ	אֶל־	וַתְּבִאֶתָּהּ	12
her head,		and she shall shave	thine house;	home	to	Then thou shalt bring her	
<u>7218</u>	<u>853</u>	<u>1548</u>	<u>1004</u>	<u>8432</u>	<u>413</u>	<u>935</u>	
					צַפְרֶיהָ:	אֶת־	
					her nails;		
					<u>6856</u>	<u>853</u>	
						וַעֲשֶׂתָּהּ	
						and pare	
						<u>6213</u>	

Before we continue with the series, I wish to address some important points in the parasha, which tie-in to the theme of today's message regarding listening, as well.

I wish to begin by reading the entire first passage of the text, and unpack some important concepts we find there.

Deut 21:10-14

10 "When you go out to battle against your enemies, and the Lord your God delivers them into your hands, and you take

them away captive, 11 and see among the captives a beautiful woman, and have a desire for [the holy soul that is within] her and would take her as a wife for yourself, 12 then you shall bring her home to your house, and she shall shave her head and trim her nails. 13 She shall also remove the clothes of her captivity and shall remain in your house, and mourn her father and mother a full month; and after that you may go in to her and be her husband and she shall be your wife. 14 And it shall be, if you are not pleased with [the soul that is within] her, then you shall let her go wherever she wishes; but you shall certainly not sell her for money, you shall not mistreat her, because you have humbled her.

This passage is used as justification by some in the Body of Faith for a rejection of G-d's "Old Testament" Law. They see it as permitting a predatory nature, a base nature, which they believe is found commonly in soldiers. They misunderstand the difference between a holy task of conquest – commanded by G-d – and the battles of the nations waged against one another based on evil intentions and desires.

A closer look at the passage will show a very different thing is going on here than many suppose.

The passage tells us much about the condition of this woman. She is a captive following a battle. If she were married (as the Goyim may imperfectly understand the concept) before, she is a widow today. She is either unmarried, or her husband died in battle. Thus, she is permitted to wed. But because she is a captive, she is destined to be only a servant in some aspect of Hebrew society. Without some intervention, she will never rise to a level of equality with her captors.

The translation of the passage into English is a bit misleading, in my opinion. I believe Sage Chaim ben Moshe ibn Attar¹ might have summed-up the idea best in his explanation of this passage.

The Torah was very careful to write בַּהּ, "something within her" instead of אֹתָהּ, "her." This means that the soldier in question is not infatuated with the body of the woman but with something inside her, her holy soul which he was able to recognise. This explains why such a woman is permitted even if she is outwardly ugly. The words יִפֹּת תֶּאֱרָךְ never related to the external appearance of the woman in question. Carnal lust is always something which feeds on the external appearance not on the invisible part of the woman.

¹ Chaim ben Moshe ibn Attar (1696-1743) was a revered rabbi in Morocco. His weekly teachings on the Torah portion of the week were eventually written down and survived in a volume known as *Or HaHayim al haTorah* (Light of Life from the Torah). He was eventually known by the title of his work, or "Or HaHayim."

The soldier is not lustful of her in a physical way, but rather he sees something of holiness within her soul that he finds attractive. The passage does not permit him to simply set her free from her captivity, but he must desire to bring her into a deeper covenant relationship with him as her husband. In Jewish culture, the husband does not “own” the wife.²

On occasion, as the parasha here recognizes, a soul destined for holiness is found within a person trapped in a society of unholiness. In this passage, G-d provides a way for her first to be removed from that evil society. Then He provides a way for her soul to be removed from harsh captivity, and she is elevated to the status of a daughter of Abraham, and is invited to be grafted-into the people of Israel. But only if she wishes to be.

The first thing after the recognition by the soldier of the soul seeking holiness within her is that he removes her from her quarters of captivity. She comes to his home. She then shaves her head and trims her nails. In this way she removes much of what might assist her in being more attractive in a physical way.

² This concept goes all the way back to Gen 17:15 when G-d instructed Abraham that Sarah’s name will no longer be known as Sarai (my Sarah), but rather Sarah (princess). G-d reminded Abraham that she belonged to G-d, and he must afford her the dignity and honor that this relationship requires of any steward of such a great gift.

she puts aside the soiled garments of her people, and dons the clean garments of a Hebrew woman. In this way she will not be recognized as a captive, but as a Hebrew, in her dress. This is the entry level for her into the Hebrew culture, and she now has the option to embrace this culture and this G-d, or reject both. The rules set out in this parasha were explained to her, so that she would understand what all this means, and what choices she has before her.

She is given a full month to mourn for her father and mother (who are presumably dead from the battle). If she were “married” to a goy, then her mourning would include his death. During this month, she will not only mourn for her dead, but she will also live the life of a Hebrew woman, under the guidance of other Hebrew women around her. She will have a month to see how the Hebrew culture differs from the pagan culture that she left. During this time she will need to make up her mind as to where she will go from here. The soldier will honor her during this time with solitude, and with an unhindered opportunity to decide upon her own fate.

After that month, he can “go in to her.” This doesn’t mean he can take her sexually against her will. The Jewish culture prohibits such a thing, even for those who are married. And there is no permission to have intercourse with her at this time anyhow, because they are not yet married. Jewish culture prohibits this as well.

How this passage is correctly interpreted is quite different than it is presented in the English rendering, and using western thought patterns. At the end of the month of separation, the soldier can again meet with her to see what changes there have been in her soul, and to see her decision regarding her future. If the soul-attraction is still there (because her holy soul shines brighter now than before), and if she agrees (there is never any forced marriage in Jewish culture), they can be married.

However, before they are married, the woman will undergo the process of moving from her former people to become part of the Hebrew people, as did Ruth and Rahab. When that process is completed, there can be a wedding.

But if at the end of the month of separation the soldier comes into her and there discovers that her soul has become dark, and she is not interested in becoming part of the Hebrew people, then the soldier can decline the marriage.

If she rejects the marriage, or the soldier declines the marriage, then she is sent out as a free woman and is no longer a slave or a captive.

The final phrase in the passage is maybe the most operative one of all, and helps us see the intent behind the entirety of the process.

then you shall let her go wherever she wishes; but you shall certainly not sell her for money, **you shall not mistreat her**, because you have humbled her.

This entire process is to be infused with respect for the woman. If the soldier sees that he misunderstood her soul at the outset, or if she wishes not to be his wife, then she is not to be considered ever again as enslaved and a servant. She is still a foreigner, because she did not join the Jewish people as one of us, but she is still elevated above being a slave.

Her captivity is ended either way. There is no downside to this process for her. What is available to her are various levels of blessing, not cursing. At the best, she is now a Hebrew, and the wife of a man who has the duty to protect, nurture, defend, and elevate her. At worst, she is a free woman and can stay among the Hebrews as a stranger, or she can even return to her own land.

What I wish for you to see in this process is the parallel with what Yeshua has done.

Yeshua is the Prince. In Hebrew culture, the Prince is the chief warrior. It is pronounced “sar” and is spelled *shin resh*. *Shin* means “destroyer.” *Resh* means “head” or “chief.”

שַׂר

Sar

Yeshua, when He appeared to Joshua at Jericho, identified Himself as the “Captain of the host [army] of the L-rd.”³ This fulfilled the highest meaning of the Hebrew word *sar*.

As a soldier, Yeshua descended into our world, and freed us from our captivity in sin, and led us out as His captives.

Ps 68:17-18

17 The chariots of God are myriads, thousands upon thousands; The Lord is among them as at Sinai, in holiness.

³ Joshua 5:14

18 You have ascended on high, You have led captive Your captives; You have received gifts among men, Even among the rebellious also, that the Lord God may dwell there.

Yeshua's act of becoming the atoning sacrifice for our sinful actions freed us from the penalties due for those sins. He recognized the holy souls within us, even as we were trapped in enemy territory.

We were led out of that captivity But it was still up to us as to whether we wish to become a bride to Him, and allow the Torah to penetrate into our hearts.⁴ If so, we can be elevated to be completely grafted-in to G-d and His people, as did Ruth. But there is no forced marriage. If our souls turn dark, and we reject Him (and thus become displeasing to Him as a bride) as is seen in Jeremiah 2:32. Rather, let us have souls washed clean with the Word, and be adorned in readiness for the coming of our Husband after the time of our separation. Let us use this time of separation to mourn regarding our former captivity, and prepare ourselves for our Husband. Our wedding garment is made of the beautiful choices for righteousness we have made in the sanctification of holiness. Let us not be found when He comes wearing the soiled clothing of our former captivity.

⁴ Matthew 13:19-23

Rev 19:6-9

"Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. 7
"Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the
marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made
herself ready." 8 And it was given to her to clothe herself in
fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous
acts of the saints. 9 And he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are
those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'"

It is clear from Scripture that we have the choice to reject our soldier-savior, even after He has rescued us from the pit. If we do, we will remain as an outsider. But if we have great desire for Yeshua as our Husband, and Torah as His Ketubah,⁵ then we will be privileged to live in the house of the L-rd forever.

You can see that the deeper theme of the passage is how deeply loved and respected the woman is by the soldier-redeemer. She listens to him and follows his call to come out of slavery. But to remain in his house as his wife, she must be fully committed to him, to his people, and to his ways of living. And that theme of listening is found in our lesson for today in having productive conversations.

⁵ Marriage contract. At Sinai, G-d offered to the assembled people His marriage contract – the Torah. We accepted it with three-fold declarations, and now we await His return after the time of separation.

Listening.

The central watchword of our faith is a verse called the *Shema*.⁶

שְׁמַע | יִשְׂרָאֵל, * יְהוָה | אֱלֹהֵינוּ, יְהוָה | אֶחָד:

“Hear O Israel, the L-rd our G-d, the L-rd is One!”

Those words were first spoken by Moshe Rabeinu (Moses our Teacher). He was the one speaking and we were to be the ones listening. Listening has always been a large part of who we are as a people. Listening involves an exchange of information from one person to another.

In a productive conversation, it is probably more important to listen than to speak. It is important to understand that listening is not the same as hearing. Our ears pick up sounds and our brain processes them. We do that naturally, and we have no real choice whether we hear or not (if our ears are uncovered). But truly listening to what is being said by another person involves a skill that rarely taught, and difficult to master.

There is a good article posted on April 28, 2024 in Psychology Today, written by Dr. Sherrie Carter Psy.D. entitled *The Power and Impact of*

⁶ Deuteronomy 6:4

*Good Listening.*⁷ She identifies five steps in the process of good listening:

Receiving. This is the hearing part of listening. This requires ignoring distractions and focusing on what the speaker is saying. This may require adjourning to a quieter location. This is where eye contact with the speaker can pay dividends. As a young father with a small daughter, who was quite excited about telling me something very important to her, I was admittedly a bit distracted. I was not making eye contact. My daughter took both her hands and placed them on either side of my face and admonished me, “Daddy. Listen to me with your eyes!” Lesson learned. I am still trying to develop this skill in my listening.

Understanding. This is where we process what we are hearing. In this phase, if you are not certain what you heard, or have questions, now is the time to ask for clarification. The other person is likely convinced that you have understood what was being said, and will go on with that presumption to build on those statements. As any good foundation requires, all stones must be well-set and sturdy. So, ask questions. You can say, “What I think I hear you say is...[repeating back your understanding]” or “I’m sorry, I don’t think I heard what you just said, please say it again.” Clarity is important in effective communication.

⁷ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/high-octane-women/202404/the-power-and-impact-of-good-listening>

One of the pitfalls in this phase is the urge to immediately respond or to make comments. Know that anything you say other than asking for clarification or understanding of the statements will have a tendency to side-track the thought process of the speaker, and that will have a tendency to prevent him from completing his thoughts.

Remembering. In order to engage in the conversation further, you will need to recall what was said as you were listening. Listeners with excellent memories can just file-away in their minds the statements being made by others. I am not at this level, so I find it best to take notes. I often will produce a pad of lined paper, and will take notes as the speaker speaks. I tell the other person that I intend to do so, and explain it by telling him that I don't want to forget important things that are said. I find that people see that as an intention to listen closely, and I have never had an objection to this practice. I don't take down every word – the purpose is not to create a transcript – but I will take down important statements, and will even put quotation marks around them. If you wish to respond to a certain assertion later in the conversation, it is best to have that assertion recorded verbatim if you intend to respond to it. If the other person denies the statement, you can show him in writing where it is recorded verbatim, with quotes. This practice has the side benefit of causing the speaker to be more careful of what he says. He intuitively knows that he might be challenged to explain or defend those

very words later on in the conversation. For my part, I avoid the tendency to misquote or misinterpret what has been said if I write it down accurately.

Evaluating. As you process what you are being told, there is a danger that you will add to, or take away, from what was said, based on your own personal preferences or emotions. Here is where all the possible disconnects we have previously discussed can manifest, and hamper effective communication. There are some techniques which give the other person in the conversation a “safe space” in which to speak.

One such technique is body language. We can all judge whether someone is really listening to us to understand. They nod their head on occasion. Another is that they make eye contact. Too much eye contact is off-putting and can suggest intimidation. I recommend using the 50-70% rule. Make eye contact this percentage of the time, and then look away to do some mental processing. But don't just look around the room, or at an attractive object elsewhere (such as a TV screen showing a sports game). Looking down is better than looking up.

Eye direction tells much, as well.⁸ Looking to the left normally indicates you are processing, or trying to remember something. Looking

⁸ <https://www.psychologistworld.com/body-language/eyes>

to the right often indicates you are fabricating something false. Of course, it is important to know that if a person is left-handed, these cues may be reversed. Avoid looking up and to the right, because that is a universal signal of boredom and dismissal.

Another technique of active listening is to ask open-ended questions. Some examples are:

“Can you tell me a bit more about that?”

“What did you think about that?”

“What do you think is the best path moving forward?”

“How do you think you could have responded differently?”

Some examples of affirming “please keep talking words” are:

“I see what you mean” or

“You make a valid point. Please go on.”

Expressions of empathy are very useful.

Those are all indices of engagement. Lean-in toward the other person on important points. Smile. A smile is almost always disarming. But avoid a wooden smile that never changes. That invokes the feeling of being prey to a predator in the person on the other side.

One of the keys to listening is patience. Don't try to fill periods of silence with your words. Let the other person compose their thoughts. Don't interrupt, except politely, and only then to ask for clarification or to repeat something you didn't hear clearly.

When the speaker is struggling for words, don't help him finish his sentences. Let them chew through the issue. You can smile and nod, indicating that you understand that conversations can be hard. Be patient and let the other person be who they are, without condemnation.

Responding. This is the final stage, according to Dr. Carter's article. It's not really a stage of listening to me, but rather the beginning of your side of the conversation. If you have successfully navigated through the first stages of listening, then you have hopefully set the stage for the other person to use the same techniques as you speak.

How you frame your statements during the response phase sets the tone for the conversation. I try to use my words to elevate the other person, and not be one who "talks down" to them.

If you are having a theological discussion and the other person has made a statement that you believe is contrary to Scripture, then you might say, "I see your point, but help me understand how we can square what you

just said with this passage of Scripture.” Or I sometimes say, “Now I’m confused. The way I understand Scripture is that [state your position], based on this passage.” Then you can turn to the passage and have them read it aloud as you follow along.

Another technique for achieving clarity in the conversation is to re-state to the other person what you believe they have just said, but in your own words. You can say, “What I think I just heard you say is...” or “I am hearing that ...”, or, “Ok, so it seems that you believe...”

If you haven’t received the correct message, they will correct you. If you have gotten it right, then they will affirm you in your understanding. Then you can move on to deal with that statement that has been fully framed. I find it useful to write down that statement verbatim, once it is established as the other person’s position.

Arlin Cuncic, MA posted on February 12, 2024 in VeryWellMind an excellent article entitled *7 Active Listening Techniques for Better Communication*.⁹ I commend it to you, for another, deeper look at some of the same things I have discussed above.

⁹ <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-active-listening-3024343>

In that article, the first technique is to “be fully present” in the conversation. She quotes Sabrina Romanoff, PsyD as saying, “Being fully present involves the skill of tuning into the other person’s inner world while stepping away from your own. This is a power skill in deeply connecting and sitting with another’s emotions.”

I wish to give an example of one person who was a very good listener, and was “fully present.” This technique provided for him huge dividends. I heard from an acquaintance of mine who actually spent some time speaking with him one-on-one at a political event. The person of whom we speak had been elected President of the US. There was a fancy reception at a swank hotel in Washington DC where he was the guest of honor. All the people there wished to have some time with him. My acquaintance was at that time the military officer tasked with arranging such events, and she wound up having a conversation with the President. She related to me that when she stood with him, talking with him, he was completely focused on her, and what she had to say. There were dozens of people standing around them, vying for the President’s attention, but he was unhurried, and laser-focused on her. She describes the experience to me as “It was as if I was the only person in the room, and what I had to say was extremely important.” This President did this with eye contact, body language, and active listening. His charisma with people sustained him even through the rough waters of scandals.

We are to listen carefully to G-d's Word. And we are to listen carefully to one another as well.